

Brave new post 9/11 world

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One would be remiss if one did not ruminate on the event of September 11, 2001 and how it has changed the world. The US mainland was attacked by some 19 or so terrorists and how. These terrorists did what was until then unthinkable. American reaction too borders on the unthinkable: in a manic rage, it has hit out blindly. It declared a holy War on Terrorism. Its progress, a year on, needs to be assessed.

The US administration, blinded by hatred, did not identify the enemy. It made do with popular prejudices and vague images of the enemy. The latter seemed an Arab from ME, who was most probably a Muslim, as such prone to be a fanatic — a disciple of Osama bin Laden. Apparently a free association of ideas and images link Islamic fundamentalists (extremists) with Taliban, OBL, Mullahs, Madrassas and Mulla Mohammad Omar and Pakistan.

Why the first concrete target, Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, was chosen needs to be analysed. Not one hijacker-terrorist of 9/11 was an Afghan, Taliban, Pakistani or even a quasi-Mullah. Unless the Bush-Blair mind arrived at Afghanistan through some such route, what followed made no sense. The same mind was at work in selecting Iraq — again with no ascertainable link with 9/11, though Saddam Hussain's assumed weapons have proved his guilt. The countdown to Iraq's invasion has begun. Baghdad's regime change seems to impend. Still some rationale has to be found: Why Iraq and why now?

Circumstances have a bearing. Anger and images have helped choose victims that had no proximate connection with 9/11. It is conceded that Mullah Omar's Taliban regime certainly comprised zealots who killed and demolished like enraged cavemen; their ethnic cleansing of minorities, driving out the women from schools and offices and destruction of invaluable Buddha were detestable. Saddam Hussain, Heaven knows, is an accomplished butcher and richly deserves what might soon be his fate, if Bush finally decides to eliminate. But are Taliban and Saddam the only abominations?

Take other circumstances. There are the US-Israeli ties. The duo have mostly common views and common methodology about dealing with the enemy. Each decides who the enemy is and how much punishment is to be inflicted and how. Adequate proof of enemy's wrongdoing is no reason to hold back the Bushes and Sharons from striking out. Does Sharon produce sufficient proof of the evil-doing by the people he eliminates? Does Bush have credible evidence of Iraq's capability to produce atomic weapons? For Sharon or Bush to strike out at a regime, it is enough that he does not like it.

Nine eleven has produced a brave new world. Its first quality is the right of the powerful to impose its will on any government that refuses to toe the American line. The powerful denies the right of the weak to be heard. It thinks little of International Law. By the same token the US-Israeli disdain of the UN falls into place. The US is not averse to utilising the UN when convenient. But when it demands the US to follow international law's canons, it con-



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ignores it. It then goes it alone. Indeed, the world has been uni-polar for over a decade. But the US is now making its unilateralism the overriding reality.

Bush doctrine's second feature is shooting at terror pre-emptively. Don't ask the question about why does the terrorist sacrifice his own life for harming and killing — Israelis and now Americans. Shooting possible terrorists before they have committed a crime is the right of the strong. Shoot first and don't ask questions even afterwards is the new norm. The thought that Americans or Israelis could be wrong never crosses either's mind. The questions why did UK create the Palestine Problem in 1917 and the US and UK aggravated it in 1948 by making the UN create Israel at Palestinians' expense are never asked. Note how abominably has Israel treated the owners of Palestine? That Israel's brutish policies produce suicide bombers is conveniently ignored.

The bloody-mindedness with which the US wanted to go it alone — disregarding all objections based on reason, law and morality — is a riddle. Is it only the arrogance of power that makes the Bush-Blair-Sharon team to ride roughshod over the rights and pleas of small and weak states? They have sanctified strikes on perceived but unproven waywardness of the target states. According to the Bush doctrine of pre-emption, reiterated on this 9/11, the US reserves the right to unilateral offensive action if it thinks it is necessary or expedient. It thinks nothing of giving a 'last chance'. Unilateralism of the uni-polar world's sole super power has made international life fearful for the weak and the small.

There is much parroting about civilisation and democracy. But democracy brings values of human equality, freedom and law to bear on public affairs inside a state. Civilised people want to apply these values to inter-state affairs, too. International Law and organisations like the League of Nations and United Nations were only the first hesitant steps in that direction. Americans who had undertaken to fund a large part of UN's expenditures are using their influence and that privilege to reduce it to Uncle Sam's chamber-maid. See how the world had difficulty in persuading a reluctant Bush to go to the UN SC for getting at least a fig leaf of justification to attack Iraq, but he remains insistent that should the UN balk, he will do it anyhow.

Few can fail to ask Bush-Blair duo heading the American juggernaut, with what precisely would you replace the Axis of Evil, Islamic fundamentalist terror or whatever qualities or facets your enemy has. Could this 'civilisation' refer to the Judeo-Christian one from which the adjective seems to have dropped? War against evil sounds good to governments go

with mundane things like strategic advantage or economic benefit or even defending threatened vested interests. Great Powers fought two World Wars in the 20th Century to do that. We should look through the rhetoric's fog and ask: does the Bush crusade against the forces of evil have any linkage with concrete American interests?

The US methodology is suggestive. Taliban were assumed to be the evil — but only for hosting Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. A new regime was therefore imposed on Afghanistan. A US citizen Zalmay Khalidzad oversaw the manufacture of Karzai regime of stooges and imposed it on Northern Alliance and the country. Many remember Khalidzad and a certain Ms Condoleezza Rice unsuccessfully lobbying with Taliban regime in 1997 to guarantee the safety of an oil and gas pipeline through their country to Balochistan and Gwadar port. The Enron connection was not absent, though the subsidiary was called Unacol that was to build the \$2.5 to 3 billion pipeline project. Many US oil giants had interest in Unacol for taking Turkmenistan's oil to the west, avoiding Iran and other routes, via Pakistan. With Karzai installed in Kabul this and other US interests will be secure. That is to be hoped.

Iraq's regime change will warm the cockles of Sharon's heart: it is the only Arab country that has the potential to fight it. From a strategic angle, Saddam's replacement with an obedient US stooge will make Israel infinitely more secure. Besides, underneath Iraq there is a huge lake of hydrocarbons. Its use and misuse by a surrogate regime might benefit the US no end. The US strategic position cannot be under threat from any Iraqi regime. But Saddam was also a danger of sorts to many Sheikhs and Kings. Without him, Sharon will find it easier to save the Arab Middle East for 'civilisation'.

True, the Afghan campaign has corrected the foolish ventures of Pakistan's ISI in Afghanistan, has lined up both India and Pakistan behind the Bush-led America as co-ordinates, if also quarrelling along the way. The American eagle continues to fly high over central Asia. The US looks set to have laid the groundwork of pre-empting — economically and politically — both Russia and China from the vast resources of Central Asia. Conceptually, the Chinese have had to retreat before the juggernaut of American money and soldiery. Insofar as Central and South Asia are concerned, the eagle is flying high.

Is it likely that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell et al have never heard of new oil and gas pipelines and investments in Central Asia? Or have perceived no strategic danger from Russia that has inherited the policies of the Soviets or of earlier Czars? Have they ever feared the growing power of China and expansion of its influence in Central Asia? They say they are doing good by removing the wicked. Most in the third world think the US is promoting its own power and profits. The US government is also examining the causes why foreigners hate America. Would someone throw light on concrete interests and raise the question of war aims? One asks no silly questions regarding the ends and means in this war.